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Common Sense, These are the Times that Try Customer's Souls

This fall I read a story about a man who wasn't allowed to cash a check at his bank because he couldn't provide a thumbprint. He couldn't provide a thumb print because he didn't have arms. When asked why they didn't make an exception, the teller and manager explained the rule clearly states no checks are to be cashed without a thumb print. I think it's a safe bet this guy moved his money (or had someone help him move his money, it would be hard to move money without arms) to another bank.

Large corporations today seem to want to substitute training with rules, rules, rules that can not possibly apply to every situation. One casualty of this business practice is common sense.

I have five phones on my cell phone plan, mine, my wife, Twyla's, our son's, his wife's, and our daughter's, not one of them call me unless they need money or are hurt.

I've been with the same cell phone company for eleven years. I'm not going to tell you the company, but people are leaving them by the droves and they aren't walking away, they are SPRINT-ING.

I've been with them longer than many of their employees have been alive. You know what you call a 17-year-old boy at the cell phone store with his pants falling off his butt?

Manager.

Twyla's talking to the manager because, obviously, she doesn't have enough to keep her busy. This kid tells her they have a great new plan that will not only save us \$17 a month, but we'll get un-limited internet, un-limited text messages, and it cleans the litter box.

Twyla signs us up. My next bill goes from \$225 to \$6,176.25. \$6,176.25! I know they're losing money, but I didn't know they

expected me to make all of it up.

Have you called customer service lately? There's 90 minutes of your life you will never get back.

First, you spend an hour wandering through their maze of automated questions:

"Please enter your ten-digit phone number."

"Press one for technical support, press two for billing support."

"Press one if you have a bill problem, press two if you want to make a payment by phone."

"Press 911 if you're about to hang yourself with your belt."

After an hour I'm connected with Customer Service Specialist, Nicole, and I'm thinking, "thank goodness, now I'll get something done. She's a specialist. I'd be worried if she was a "Customer Service Generalist."

First thing Nicole asks is, "May I have your ten digit phone number?"

"You mean I was on hold so long, the computer forgot my phone number?"

She pulls up my account and

asks, "Okay, Mr. Rader, what's the problem?"

"What's the problem? You see my last bill is \$6,176.25 and you ask 'What's the problem?'"

"Hmmm, yes, that does seem high."

"No, Nicole, you misunderstand the nature of my call. I've waited on hold for an hour because I want to tell you what a great deal I'm getting. One month cell phone service for just \$6,000. Last year I paid three times that and all I got was a new car."

She says, "Mr. Rader, there is no reason to be sarcastic."

"Oh, I think there are 6,000 reasons to be sarcastic."

Nicole finds the store manager mistakenly set us up for their \$1 a minute plan and, even though it is clearly their mistake, she is only authorized to adjust bills up to \$50. She will send it to upper management to be adjusted and they will call within five business days.

A week later, not having heard a word, I go through the

customer service maze again, finally getting "Harold." (I believe it not only insults our intelligence, but degrades the Indian worker when American companies make them use a fake name to try to conceal they are in an Indian call center. We can hear their accent and know they're not in Dubuque.) He tells me not only has nothing been done to adjust our bill, but there is no record of me talking with Nicole.

"Harold" agrees it is their mistake, but instead of following the rule, he uses common sense. Putting me on hold, "Harold" hunts down his supervisor, and gets the bill adjusted to the proper amount.

As you know, I fly Southwest Airlines because they get me there on time and my bags go to the same city. (It's bad enough when your bags don't arrive, but it really upsets me when they go to a nicer destination.) No company is perfect, but regardless of the problem, Southwest employees handle it

not by consulting a manual of rules and regulations, but by using common sense.

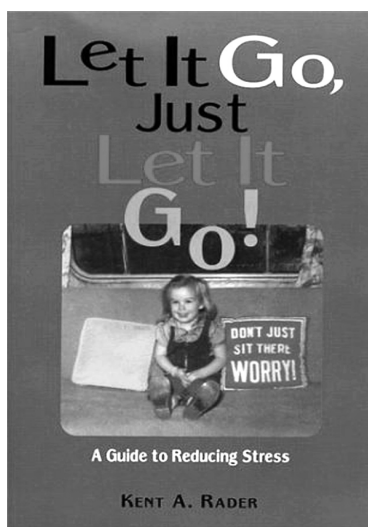
Twenty years ago, Colleen Barrett of Southwest Airlines issued a memo to employees addressing this very issue. In part, it says,

"No Employee will ever be punished for using good judgment and good old common sense when trying to accommodate a Customer, no matter what our rules are."

When you train employees and encourage them to use their judgment and common sense to solve problems, not only do you have a better solution to your company's problems, you have empowered employees who take pride in their work, and happier, more loyal customers.



I wish you the best of success in 2010 and always remember laughter matters.



Known as the world's cleanest comedian and speaker, Kent Rader helps people learn and experience how laughter matters in reducing stress. A reformed accountant, Kent has written the stress reduction book titled Let It Go, Just Let It Go available at Amazon.com and featured in the Country Inns and Suites Read It And Return Program in 200 hotels. Kent is the winner of the 2007 Branson Comedy Festival and his new program titled, Dreams Do Come True, Leadership Lessons Learned on my Journey from Accounting to Comedy debuted in September 2009 at the Kansas Home Care Conference. One conference participant said, "You are a wonderful reminder that our human nature provides unlimited opportunities to laugh, share, and defuse the stresses of our lives in a way that is neither offensive nor exclusionary" For information or a free DVD, please contact Kent at 405-209-3273 or email kent@kentraderspeaks.com.



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Take This Job and Love It!

So the latest winner of my “worst job contest” (held during my humor keynotes) was a guy whose first job was working on a cruise ship in the kitchen. Well, not exactly the kitchen; more like beneath the kitchen where the “used” food from people’s trays rode down a conveyer belt and was dumped into a big vat. . . in which he then had to dig around in it to find the silverware that people left on their tray. Yeah, I’m guessing he’s still scraping tapioca from his fingernails. Other winners of my contest include being a talking Christmas tree at the mall, cleaning bathrooms at NASCAR races, putting ice in men’s room urinals, eviscerating chickens and wrapping toilet paper on the rolls at the TP factory!

I love laughing about bad past jobs because it reminds us of how things change, and that

you can get through anything IF you look for the funny, not the frustrating.

One of my most hideous jobs was right out of college, when you just don’t know any better. There was a new term floating around called “marketing,” and I naively thought that all marketing was the same. . . direct marketing, marketing director, TELEMARKETING. You can guess which one I wound up doing. Now, when they don’t tell you what the product is in the help wanted ad that means there’s something really wrong. In my case, it turned out to be telemarketing SIDES OF BEEF.

After a rigorous job interview that consisted of the HR woman taking my pulse, she led me to my “office”: a conference room with other fresh college graduates who looked like deer-in-headlights too. The HR woman, who then morphed into my boss (she was a multi-tasker), told me this wasn’t exactly cold calling because they had qualified leads . . . and then she handed me the phone book. I guess back in the 80’s she figured that most

people in Northern Virginia ate beef, hence the white pages held thousands of qualified leads.

I lasted 6 hours, which gave me seniority. That’s right, half way through the second day (I can’t believe I went back) another beef-seller and I took our regulation 15 minute break to go to Roy Rogers. (I still don’t know why we went to a roast beef restaurant on our beef break?) Cutting through the parking lot on the way back to Beef Headquarters, I saw my car. My sub-conscientious took over and I made a sharp left, jumped in and sped away FAST! (Just in case my boss morphed into company security and chased me down. I didn’t realize they can’t MAKE you stay). I think she still owes me \$24 dollars in pay (though luckily no commissions - I wasn’t very good).

Yes, I’m happy that my career has changed, but am I sad that I wasted 2 days calling people about beef? No way! I’ve got great cocktail conversation and, along with several other weird jobs, a solid foundation for handling change. I see the kids

today seeking quick fame and fortune on shows like *American Idol* and I think, man, they are missing all the fun in the journey! That's a lame interview: "How did you get here?"

"I won a contest".

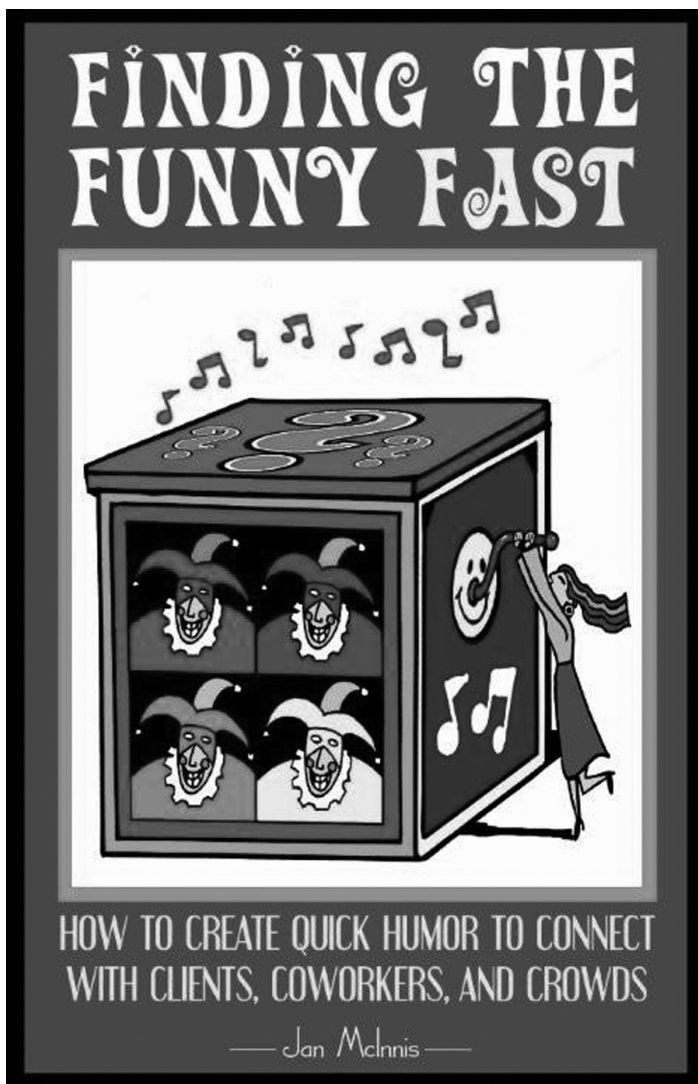
Wouldn't you rather hear "Well, I started out collecting hamster saliva. . ."

Also, if you spend your time trying to avoid change, instead of meeting it head on, then how will you handle things when they do get rough (which WILL

eventually happen, trust me!)? I once did a tough comedy bar gig in which the bar owner asked me (direct quote) "you ain't got any of them think'n jokes do ya?" Like I was gonna accidentally educate his crowd. Yes, I do have "think'n jokes" and yes the show was awful. Hopefully no one secretly taped it and it won't wind up on a VH-1 "Behind the Comedy" special. But now I can handle ANY group with ease because it's not going to be as bad as that! I'm guessing

the first time an *American Idol* winner does a bar gig where some drunk heckles obscenities, the "Idol" will crumble!

So bring on the weird, unfamiliar, and hard change! Focus on the funny and you'll persevere. And at the next cocktail party, you won't see me chatting with the guy who won his way to riches; I'll be hanging with the woman who smells faintly of cruise ship tapioca.



Jan McInnis is a comedian and professional speaker who has shared her customized humor keynotes "Finding the Funny in Change," "Finding the Funny in Communications" and "Cubicle Comedy" with hundreds of associations and corporations. She is also the author of "Finding the Funny FAST," and she was featured in the Wall Street Journal as one of the most popular convention humor speakers. From the meeting planner for Pinnacle Health's conference: "I simply can't remember when I have laughed so hard for so long. We were delighted the way you drew the audience in by using the events of the weekend and added your unique brand of humor to them."

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